**The Chanukah Story: Two Miracles!**

About 2177 years ago,the Jewish people lived in Israel. At that time, the Greek king Antiochus IV ruled over Israel. The Temple stood proudly in Jerusalem, and the Jews served G-d faithfully, although there were a few unfaithful Jews who thought it was better to look and behave as the Greeks did. They adopted the Greek way of life, and even bowed down to idols! Antiochus IV was a very wicked king. He did not want the Jewish people to be able to practice Judaism and made life for the Jews very difficult. He tried to make the Jews become more like the Greeks, and made Jewish practice illegal. He commanded his army to punish Jews who continued to only worship one G-d and study Torah. He forced Jews to bow down to Greek idols and eat foods that were not kosher (quickly give examples of certain foods that are not kosher: pork, shellfish, milk and meat). In Jerusalem, the soldiers destroyed the Holy Temple by erecting idols, letting pigs run around, and burning Torah scrolls.

In 168 BCE, a Greek officer led a group of soldiers to the village of Modin, near Jerusalem. There they erected an idol of a Greek god. The officer asked Mattathias, a well respected leader of community, to bow down to the idol because then other Jews would think it was ok for them to bow down too. Mattathias had five sons, and together they refused to bow down to the idol and they ran to the hills of Judah along with all of the other Jews who wanted to fight against the Greek army. Even though the Jewish people did not have an organized army, and were very few in number compared to the very large and advanced Greek army, they were so passionate about remaining Jewish, that they would do anything possible to fight for their freedom.

Mattathias became the leader of the Jewish rebellion, however, he was very old and he passed away before the fight was over. He left his middle son, Judah, in charge of the Jewish fighters. Judah was such a brave fighter, that he became known as “Judah the Maccabee,” the Hebrew word for “hammer.” After three long years of fighting, the Jewish people defeated the well trained Greek army. It was a miracle!

After the fighting was over, Judah and his army of Jews traveled to Jerusalem to clean and purify the Temple that was nearly destroyed by the Greek army. On the twenty-fifth day of the Hebrew month of Kislev in the year 165 BCE, exactly three years since the fighting started, Judah and his followers rededicated the Temple to G-d. “Chanukah” means rededication- and that’s where we get the name of this holiday!) But when they looked for the special oil to light the lamps of the menorah, they only found a small vial of oil that would not last until they could get more. But through a miracle, the oil lasted for eight days and eight nights, just enough time for them to find more oil! Judah declared that every year for eight days, the Jews in every land would celebrate this happy holiday in gratitude for G-d’s many miracles- and we still celebrate it today!